

VZCZCXRO9104  
PP RUEHROV  
DE RUEHAM #1410/01 0881338  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 291338Z MAR 07  
FM AMEMBASSY AMMAN  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7879  
INFO RUEHKK/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 001410

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/28/2017  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [EFIN](#) [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [KPAL](#) [JO](#)  
SUBJECT: PARLIAMENT PASSES THREE KEY REFORM BILLS, AND  
ADJOURNS

REF: A. A) AMMAN 1022  
[B. B\) AMMAN 1183](#)  
[C. C\) AMMAN 1163](#)  
[D. D\) AMMAN 1185](#)  
[E. E\) AMMAN 528](#)  
[F. F\) 06 AMMAN 8908](#)

AMMAN 00001410 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: CDA Daniel Rubinstein for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1. \(C\) Summary:](#) Before ending their spring session March 28, Jordan's two houses of parliament hurriedly enacted three political reform bills on political parties, municipal government, and press and publications; all were high priorities for the government (refs A and B). They also passed important amendments to trademarks and patents laws. Parliament did not act on a draft anti-money laundering bill (ref C), a government-supported effort to revive mandatory national service (ref D), and a freedom of information bill.

[2. \(C\) King Abdullah has the option of recalling this parliament for an extraordinary session, but senior palace officials tell post the GOJ does not currently plan to do so.](#)  
After parliamentary elections in late 2007, a new parliament will convene. End summary.

#### Municipal Government Reform Bill

-----

[3. \(U\) As expected, the Senate passed the government's municipal government reform bill \(refs A and B\) on March 20, paving the way for expanded local elections this summer once the King ratifies the law. Immediately following the vote, Minister of Municipalities Nader Thuheirat confirmed in press statements that the government would hold municipal elections in July.](#)

[4. \(U\) The Senate upheld a lower house amendment allowing each municipal council \(rather than the central government\) to appoint the professional municipal manager \(an official who has always served alongside each Jordanian mayor.\) The law also includes a 20 per cent minimum quota for women on municipal councils, and allows the GOJ to appoint two members to each council \(ref E\). As in the past, the central government will continue to appoint the mayor of Amman and 50 per cent of the Amman council. Advocates of faster democratization, including Islamic Action Front MPs, beat back attempts to apply this "Amman model" to Irbid and Zarqa, Jordan's second and third largest cities. As a result, Islamist candidates are likely to fare well in these two municipalities.](#)

#### Press and Publications Reform

-----

¶5. (SBU) In the same whirlwind session, the Senate endorsed the press and publications reform bill while striking a controversial section -- added by security-minded members of the lower house -- that explicitly provided for imprisonment of journalists for some offenses. The lower house then reversed its earlier decision, and unanimously agreed to drop the offending paragraph on March 21 (ref A). The final version of the law also precludes detention of journalists prior to conviction.

¶6. (SBU) The new law will significantly reduce the scope of punishable media offenses (ref A). Some media observers, however, contend that the government could still invoke the penal code and state security law to try media critics. While the government has not sought to imprison anyone in recent years for media offenses, some media advocates maintain that journalists will self-censor unless there is a specific provision in the press law exempting journalists from prosecution under libel and other laws. Conservative MPs carried the day with their response that this would give journalists an immunity that ordinary Jordanians do not enjoy.

#### Political Parties Reform

-----

¶7. (C) Parliament passed a new political parties law that will increase from 50 to 500 the minimum membership of an organization seeking legal recognition as a party, simplify some registration procedures, and provide a mechanism for some government funding of parties in the future if a special regulation is enacted (ref E). Minister of Political Development Mohammad Ouran (a frequent critic of the U.S. before joining the cabinet) called the decision to raise minimum membership requirements a "crime against Jordan." Leaders of the small parties likely to bear the brunt of the new rules have publicly called on the King to veto the new legislation. Post understands he will not do so, as he hopes

AMMAN 00001410 002.2 OF 002

for a consolidation of Jordan's fractured secular political forces behind one or two parties capable of competing with the large and well-organized Islamic Action Front.

#### Key Amendments to Trademarks and Patents Laws

-----

¶8. (U) Parliament passed new amendments to Jordan's Patents Law No. 32 of 1999 (last amended in 2001), and the Trademarks Law No. 33 of 1952 (amended in 1957 and 1999). The government submitted these bills to Parliament in 2004. Once published in the official gazette, these amendments will allow Jordan to accede to the Patent Cooperation Treaty and the Madrid Protocol. Fines for violations of either law will be raised to JD 6,000 (approximately US\$ 8,400), bringing the laws into compliance with the U.S.-Jordan Free Trade Agreement.

#### Unfinished Business

-----

¶9. (SBU) The anti-money laundering bill (septel), though endorsed by a lower house committee, never reached the floor for debate by the full house. The conscription bill, which the government introduced late in the session, did not leave committee. The freedom of information bill, which the King mentioned as a priority along with the three political reform bills which did pass, did not make it out of committee either. Several MPs told poloff that despite the King's speech, ministers and Palace staffers pressed them hard to move on other bills, and there was no time to evaluate the freedom of information draft. All these items of unfinished business are likely to re-surface during parliament's next session.

¶10. (C) COMMENT: The lower house of parliament, dominated by tribal leaders, friends of the security services, and

other East Bank establishment figures, approved the government's three political reform bills grudgingly, and only under the pressure of the King's publicly-expressed desire that they pass, which he made clear during the "We Are All Jordan" national unity convention of July 2006, and his speech opening parliament (ref F). The toughest reform question facing Jordan - revision of the law governing the election of the national parliament - remained off the agenda, in part because the Palace concluded it would have been dead on arrival with this parliament, and in part because of fears that changing the election rules would result in a legislature dominated by Palestinian-Jordanians and Islamists. END COMMENT.

Visit Amman's Classified Web Site at  
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/amman/>  
RUBINSTEIN